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Psycho-emotional effects generated by the covid-19 pandemic on the lives of students

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Abstract. The central objective of this paper was to analyze the psycho-emotional effects that the Covid-19 Pandemic caused on the lives of students in Romania. To achieve this goal, 91 students were surveyed, using quantitative and qualitative methods. The aim was to identify levels of anxiety, depression, dysfunctional and functional emotions (fear and sadness). In addition to these variables, it was also observed how personality traits can moderate the psycho-emotional effects generated. The results obtained in this correlational study are supported by other research conducted in the last 3 years. The results reveal how extraversion and emotional stability can be good predictors of functional emotions. Extraversion correlated positively with depression, and emotional stability correlated negatively with the dysfunctional emotions of fear and sadness. While, at the opposite pole, introversion and neuroticism are risk factors for mental health. They may experience more severely the psychosocial and affective impact of the changes related to COVID19. While extraversion and emotional stability proved to be good predictors of functional emotions, conscientiousness represented an indicator for the extent to which young people are willing to comply with measures to prevent infection with the Covid-19 virus (mask wearing, timely declarations of night, social distancing, keeping the distance limit). On the other hand, the students claimed that the pandemic created for them a state of tension, anxiety, insecurity, the reason being that they did not know how things would evolve and what would happen next with classes/exams, and the information received from the management side were not clear. The felt anxiety was associated with the variable - alcohol consumption. The findings of this research create the favorable context for the development of larger, qualitative research, providing evidence regarding the importance of personality traits as a relevant predictor of differences between individuals during the pandemic. Due to the small number of participants in the study, there are certain limitations in that the results obtained cannot be generalized to a larger population than the subjects that make up the sample.

Keywords. effects, emotions, pandemic, students



1. The impact of the covid-19 virus on students

1.1. The context of the Covid-19 pandemic in Romania

The routine and ordinary daily life has changed significantly with the discovery and exponential transmission of COVID-19. COVID-19 (or Sars-Cov-2) is a novel coronavirus originally discovered in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019. Initially reported as a case of "unknown pneumonia", the escalation of the worldwide response occurred rapidly. COVID-19 can cause the infected person to experience a range of respiratory symptoms, but the most commonly reported symptoms include a persistent cough, fever and a loss of taste and/or smell.

As COVID-19 spread across the globe, the World Health Organization declared it a public health emergency of international concern on January 30, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020).

Each nation has tackled the issue of COVID-19 by implementing strict measures to reduce the impact of the virus and a series of interventions centered on social distancing. Initially, in Romania, it was decided to implement preventive measures such as closing the borders and interrupting international flights. When the number of cases of COVID-19 began to increase, however, more restrictive measures were resorted to limit the movement of people.

Starting from March 16, 2020, a state of emergency is established in Romania by Decree no. 195 of March 16, 2020. During this period, "quarantine" was introduced, defined as the separation of individuals who may have been exposed to an infectious disease from the rest of the population, in order to determine whether they are sick and thus reduce the risk of infecting others.

Thus, social interactions of all forms were reduced, including typical work practices, shopping habits, and education. During this period, people could only leave their homes for specific needs (work, health emergencies and food and medicine), schools and universities were closed, inter-regional mobility was suspended, and all types of gatherings were banned. This is how the concept of social isolation was created, which aims to limit relationships and the frequency of contact with family, friends and the community (Escalante et al., 2020).

Susanu (2020) highlights a spectrum of behavioral adaptations that emerged in response to the stress and ambiguity engendered by the novel pandemic context. These adaptations include:

-Variations in moral conduct, where Susanu draws a distinction between altruistic individuals and those exhibiting ignorance. Altruists demonstrated empathy and actively contributed to the welfare of others in their vicinity. In contrast, the ignorant category is characterized by individuals who flouted restrictions and denied the virus's existence.

-Alterations in consumer behavior, particularly in relation to provisioning. A notable trend was the propensity of numerous individuals to engage in excessive purchasing, a behavior that not only reflected their own panic but also influenced others to mimic this pattern.

-Avoidance behavior, a direct outcome of the measures implemented by authorities. The enforcement of social distancing norms resulted in the formation of distinct social groups and divisions, each aligning with their respective perceptions of the pandemic's threat level.

With the closure of educational institutions, there was a need for a rapid transition from physical learning to the digital sphere of learning (Kapasias et al. 2020). Online learning has been noted as a possible alternative to conventional learning (Adnan and Anwar 2020).



However, according to a meta-analysis on e-learning (Cook 2009), online learning is reported to be similar to conventional learning. To improve the e-learning experience, educational institutions are required to comply with the guidelines and recommendations of government agencies, while encouraging students to continue learning remotely in this challenging environment (Aucejo et al. 2020).

COVID-19 has posed both a direct and indirect threat to the well-being of students, affecting their social lives. This paper aims to report the psycho-social effects of students from different regions of the globe, but also to discover how Romanian students were affected emotionally, academically and socially. These aspects are imperative for adjusting or implementing new measures that will support academic life in a future pandemic context.

1.2. The effects of the Covid-19 virus on academic life

In terms of quality of life, we can distinguish three major areas that are in close interaction with each other. Physical health, mental health and social health together contribute to the subjective health of the individual (Kopp and Piko, 2006). Health consciousness, the role of environmental effects, as well as the individual's attitude system and mental disposition appear equally in the maintenance or loss of quality of life.

Keyes (2002, in: Reinhardt et al., 2020) believes that people who are characterized by excellent mental functioning reach a high level in terms of emotional, psychological and social well-being, as long as there is no symptom disorder of any kind. Therefore, it was expected that the continued spread of the disease, travel restrictions and the closure of educational institutions across the country would have a significant effect on the education, social life and mental health of students (Odrizola-gonzález et al. 2020).

Students from less privileged backgrounds experienced more intense negative experiences due to the Covid-19 outbreak (Aucejo et al. 2020). Declining family income, limited access to digital resources, and the high cost of internet connectivity have disrupted students' academic lives. In addition, 1.5 billion students worldwide are now deprived of basic education (Lee, 2020), leading to a serious psychological impact on their health.

Moreover, changes in daily routine, including lack of outdoor activity, disrupted sleep patterns, social distancing affected students' mental well-being. (Cao et al. 2020). The term well-being refers to a number of factors that contribute to fulfillment and good physical health and is a good predictor of academic life (El Ansari and Stock, 2010).

Dodge et al. (2012) provide a broader and updated definition of this concept, explaining that well-being is an accumulation of psychological, social and physical resources necessary and useful in overcoming any kind of challenge.

As noted by GuildHE (2018), defining wellbeing in higher education is a challenging prospect due to the wealth of evidence available and the complexity of the concept. The term student well-being can also be described as a population-level term that encompasses the positive emotion and inner capacity of an individual to cope with the challenges of everyday life and their academic journey (Barkham et al., 2019).

A study carried out in 2021 that aims to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education, health, social life of students, identifies fundamental changes in sleeping habits, physical activity and social interaction. These have significantly affected the lives of students,



having negative effects in terms of health. The researchers conclude that the measures imposed were necessary to regulate safety conditions, there is no strategy to minimize the psychological impact caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (Chaturvedi, Vishwakarma & Singh, 2021).

A strong sense of resilience was noted in students during this period, they were shown to be skeptical of support services due to the social implications, research found that there was also fear around mental health disclosures on social networks. Mental health disclosures on Instagram were considered impossible by students, with stigma being one of the main barriers to disclosure (Budenz et al., 2020).

The inherent unpredictability of the pandemic has been linked to less than optimal mental health outcomes across the general populace, as indicated by Zandifar and Badrfam (2020). Globally, students have grappled with uncertainties regarding their academic pursuits. These concerns range from apprehensions about contracting the virus upon the reopening of educational campuses to anxieties over the potential inability to complete their studies.

An investigative study in Italy revealed significant psychological impacts on students due to the pandemic. It was found that over 60% of the student population experienced distress owing to the suspension of physical university attendance. Additionally, 35.03% of the students expressed concerns about the pandemic potentially curtailing their academic activities. Another 30.14% were apprehensive about the possibility that preventative health measures might impede their academic progress. About 21% of the respondents were worried about returning to the university environment. Furthermore, 39.72% harbored fears regarding their future professional trajectories, influenced by COVID-19's ramifications on the nation, its economy, and the job market, as detailed by Villani et al. in 2021.

1.3. Psycho-emotional effects

Previous studies investigating the effect of disasters on mental health have found that large-scale traumatic events that have economic and social consequences are associated with an increased burden of mental illness in affected populations (Goldmann & Galea, 2014). In this subchapter, we aim to discover what were the psycho-emotional effects that the Covid-19 virus generated on students on a large scale. Conditions such as anxiety, depression, how eating or sleeping behaviors have been affected, but also general well-being will be monitored.

1.3.1. Anxiety

Within the context of stress and anxiety, students are identified as a vulnerable demographic, as delineated by Deng et al. (2021). The American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 2016 categorizes various forms of anxiety, with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) being particularly noteworthy. GAD is characterized by a pervasive and excessive sense of worry and fear that substantially disrupts an individual's regular activities and functioning. Anxiety, as a psychological condition, harbors numerous detrimental impacts on an individual's life. Specifically, the APA (2016) notes that anxiety disorders can adversely affect academic performance, highlighting the significant influence these conditions have on educational outcomes.

In a pandemic context, wanting to identify the effects that the Covid-19 virus has on the well-being of students, Villani L., along with other researchers, are conducting such a study in Italy. In 2021, the results of this study indicate that among the sample of students, 35.33% of them



show symptoms specific to anxiety, confirming that the pandemic has increased the risk of mental health among students (Vilanni et al., 2021).

Research conducted both prior to and during the pandemic indicates a notable impact of the pandemic on the anxiety levels of students. For instance, Yuksel & Bahadir-Yilmaz (2019) found that, in the 2016-2017 academic year in Turkey, 25.2% of 330 nursing school students exhibited severe anxiety symptoms. In a stark contrast, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Senturk and Bakir (2021) observed that 54.1% of 506 nursing students in Turkey experienced extremely severe anxiety symptoms.

Stressors affecting students can be categorized into three primary domains: personal, social, and academic, as outlined by Reddy Menon & Thattil (2018). Personal stressors encompass aspects such as individual personality traits, psychological issues, and financial difficulties (Shaikh & Deschamps, 2006). Social stressors include dynamics in family and friendship relationships (Yubero et al., 2018).

Academically, stressors for students arise from issues like learning difficulties, examination anxiety, challenges in communication with faculty, and career-related anxieties (Lucas & Berkel, 2005). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges for university students, as noted by Deng et al. (2021).

Additionally, the pandemic introduced novel concerns for students, such as uncertainties about their academic progression and future career prospects. These new factors contribute to the heightened levels of anxiety observed among students in the current pandemic context.

There are studies that show that distance education can have a negative impact on students, but this was the only solution during the pandemic to continue university studies (Kapasias et al., 2021). Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically affected all areas of life (Saladino, Algeri and Auriemma, 2020).

Therefore, students have to struggle with problems, not only educationally, but also in their private lives, for example, the fear of getting infected with COVID-19, social isolation, financial problems and lack of self-motivation (Alvarez, 2020).

1.3.2. Motivation

The student needs the feeling of prosperity necessary to adopt the learning behavior. Thriving requires being both energetic and full of life (vitality) as well as a constant desire to improve skills (learning).

Prosperous students flourish on a sense of energy as well as the belief that they are developing and improving their abilities (Porath et al., 2012). When students thrive in academic activity, they experience positive feelings about their progress, they will feel enthusiastic, which will motivate them to continue this learning process.

By its very nature, prosperity is closely linked to student well-being and academic performance. According to Brown et al. (2017), individuals learn best when they are motivated, and this motivation is a part of well-being that plays an important role in student success. Students who are motivated to learn have a distinct advantage because their academic success is often seen as an indicator of their prosperity (Brown et al., 2017).

A 2021 study examining the effect of anxiety on university students found that higher levels of anxiety led to lower levels of vitality and learning. Students with high levels of anxiety had



lower vitality and learning scores compared to their peers with low levels of anxiety (Sahin, Tuna, 2021).

1.3.3. Depression

A cross-sectional study found that the prevalence of depression among US adults was 27.8% during the pandemic, compared to 8.5% before the pandemic (Ettman et al., 2020). These numbers may be even higher in at-risk populations with additional stressors, for example higher education students represent a population that is particularly vulnerable to developing mental health disorders during this pandemic.

Even in non-pandemic circumstances, university and college students may experience considerable anxiety and depression due to factors such as academic pressure and financial hardship (Saleh et al., 2017). As shown in an international meta-analysis, the prevalence of depression among pre-pandemic university students worldwide was 30.6% (Ibrahim et al., 2013). This figure is substantially higher than the prevalence of depression of 12.9% in the pre-pandemic global population (Lim et al., 2018).

As a direct result of the pandemic and its associated control measures, students in higher education may experience various symptoms due to drastic deviations from their normal routines. These challenges can be further compounded by social distancing, which deprives students of valuable resources, the support services offered by their universities, and their family and friends.

The resulting psychological suffering can further develop into complications such as decreased self-esteem or self-efficacy (Saleh et al., 2017), if these symptoms go unnoticed or untreated, these complications can lead to serious consequences such as suicidal ideation or other disorders (Arria et al., 2009).

In the pandemic context, wanting to identify the effects that the Covid-19 virus has on the well-being of students, Villani L., along with other researchers, are conducting such a study in Italy. In 2021, the results of this study indicate that among the sample made of students, 72.93% of them show mild symptoms specific to depression confirming that the pandemic has increased the risk of mental health among students (Vilanni et al, 2021).

Another study investigating depression among college students (Deng et al, 2021) finds that the prevalence of depressive symptoms in undergraduate students (32%) is higher compared to graduate students (25%); a similar trend exists for the prevalence of anxiety symptoms (24% vs. 14%).

The marked discrepancy observed between the two cohorts may stem from differential abilities in emotional self-regulation between graduate and undergraduate students. It is plausible that graduate students, through more extensive exposure to stressful situations, have honed more robust coping strategies in comparison to their undergraduate counterparts.

Complementary studies, such as those conducted by Alsubaie et al. (2019) and McCloud & Bann (2019), reveal that various factors including financial status, living conditions (namely, solitary living versus residing with family or friends), and gender significantly affect the occurrence of depressive and anxiety symptoms among higher education students amidst the pandemic. Notably, students from financially disadvantaged or low-income backgrounds tend to exhibit a higher frequency of depressive and anxiety symptoms relative to those from more affluent



backgrounds. Similarly, students residing alone are found to experience a greater prevalence of these symptoms in contrast to those living in communal settings with family or friends.

1.3.4. Sleep disorders

Sleep is a physiological process aimed at regulating and repairing the body, playing a key role in many of its functions. Sleep disorders are often comorbid with mental and physical health, these symptoms not only decrease quality of life, but can also worsen mental and physical illness, reduce life satisfaction, and increase the risk of mortality (Kim & Ko, 2018).

The fear surrounding the coronavirus disease, the emotional stress of isolation and the economic burden brought by the situation, make this environment favorable to the increase of anxious and depressive symptoms in the population. Therefore, their sleep patterns and efficiency are affected. The most observed sleep disorders are insomnia, which can be associated with high emotional stress, and out of phase sleep caused by using social networks for longer periods of time at night, thereby changing the circadian rhythm of the brain, both of which negatively affect the regulation of organic functions of the body as well as emotion and cognition, as sleep is the main factor in memory consolidation (Saad et al., 2021)

Sleep disturbances are becoming common and chronic symptoms among youth and correlate with increased risks of psychological, somatic, and depressive problems (Bilsky et al., 2020). The pandemic has led to major changes in human behavior in general. Taking into account the students, who underwent a drastic adaptation in the form of learning, given the transition from face-to-face to online courses, it could not be otherwise. According to a survey published in June 2020, it was observed that after starting online classes, students began to spend more hours sleeping. However, even though they slept more, they went to bed later each day, and this may be associated with poorer health (Wright Jr. et al., 2020).

In addition, morning wake times were also delayed without producing any change in the amount of total sleep acquired per night. We can assume that the students adapted their work to their individual sleep chronotypes, given that without a strict schedule, they could follow their own biological rhythm. Sleep-wake schedules are organized according to time spent awake and fixed times for activities of the day, such as waking up, eating, studying, interacting with family members. Sun exposure plays a crucial role in this functioning, however, due to isolation, such activity is impaired. Research confirms that the sleep rhythm changes significantly after a few days of isolation, becoming out of sync with the outside world (Morin et al., 2020).

Moreover, isolation also facilitated the adoption of sedentary lifestyles by adolescents and young adults. There was a reduction in the amount of physical exercise, as opposed to an increase in time spent on electronic equipment (Brito et al., 2020). It is already known that practicing exercises influences sleep quality, especially in latency and number of daily hours (Oliveira, 2016). In addition, daily physical activity is associated with a lower risk of psychological distress, minimizing negative thoughts caused by illness and social distancing (Zhang Zhang, Ma, & Di, 2020).

Young people under 35 who watch updates on COVID-19 for more than three hours a day, either via news or mobile devices, have been found to have higher levels of anxiety and depression, leading to increased levels of cortisol in the body and a reduction in melatonin synthesis, causing changes in the normal biological rhythm of sleep (Marelli et al., 2020). Reading about the daily



positive cases and the number of deaths due to COVID-19, as well as the socioeconomic situation, were identified as some of the main causes of the increase in depressive and anxious symptoms in students during this period. (Maia & Dias, 2020).

Uncertainty about being able to afford university expenses, concerns about the health of family and friends, and worry about the impact of the pandemic on students' future careers have caused a lot of stress, especially for university students who live alone and away from their families, due to reduced social interactions and lack of social support. Graduate students also suffer from difficulty finding jobs and completing academic assignments (Islam et al., 2020; Elmer et al., 2020).

Anxiety and depression are associated with worsening insomnia symptoms, which have been discussed at length in the topics above. In students, greater difficulties were observed in the initial stages of sleep and, although the total number of hours of sleep was not decreased, their quality worsened (Marelli et al., 2020).

Numerous studies, including a survey among nursing students in Spain, have highlighted significant alterations in sleep patterns following the COVID-19 outbreak. Despite an increase in time spent in bed, these students exhibited reduced actual sleep duration, indicative of diminished sleep efficiency and difficulties initiating sleep.

Students are recognized as a demographic particularly susceptible to elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, surpassing those in the general population. Given this vulnerability, it is crucial to discern the pandemic's impact on this group, to understand the contributing factors to these outcomes, and to explore potential interventions that could mitigate risks and symptoms that may indirectly or directly influence their academic lives.

The widespread trauma experienced by the university community during the pandemic warrants serious consideration. However, as Wilton (2020) suggests, there exists an unprecedented opportunity for positive transformation. Insights gained during this period are likely to foster enhancements in online services, heightened recognition of loneliness's impact on students, and a necessity to diversify services to accommodate diverse student needs.

Given the high anxiety levels observed in students globally and its ramifications on their academic well-being, it is imperative to investigate these facets thoroughly. However, there remains a notable paucity of research encompassing the Romanian student population. Addressing this lacuna, the current study aims to elucidate the psycho-emotional effects engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of these students.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Study objectives

Starting from the analysis of specialized literature, the general objective of the research is to analyze the psycho-emotional effects that the Covid-19 Pandemic has caused on the lives of students in Romania.

The secondary objectives of the research that will determine the achievement of the main objective are the following:

1. Identification of valid psychological measurement tools, through which we can identify personality traits and the level of anxiety, distress and depression of students.



2. Administering the tools to a group of participants who comply with the research requirements, i.e., they are students between the ages of 18-35.
3. Rating the answers, according to the instructions of the authors of the instruments, creating a database and statistical analysis of the data obtained, in order to identify the relationships between the two concepts.
4. Description of the results obtained based on the specialized literature.

2.2. Hypotheses

1. It is assumed that there is a negative correlation between the conscientiousness scale and the violation of measures to prevent the Covid 19 pandemic.

2. It is hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between the extraversion scale and depression.

3. It is assumed that there is a positive correlation between alcohol consumption and the anxiety variable

4. It is hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between emotional stability and dysfunctional emotions.

2.3. Study participants

In order to achieve the objectives of the research and to verify the working hypotheses, 91 subjects, aged between 19 and 35 years, 50 female and 41 male, were questioned. The respondents of the study are of Romanian nationality, 24% come from the rural environment and 76% from the urban environment, they follow university courses at different faculties in Romania.

None of the participants in the study could physically attend classes during the Pandemic, these being replaced by forms of online courses such as video conferencing, sending presentations to students and written communication (forums, chat, etc.). Of the 91 respondents, 31 pay tuition fees at the universities they are enrolled in.

Convenience sampling was used to make up the sample.

2.4. Instruments

To carry out the study, the emotional distress profile (PDE), an instrument developed to assess the dimension of functional and dysfunctional negative emotions, the Five Factor Personality Inventory (FFPI), developed by Hendriks, Hofstee, de Raad, Angleitner, was used. Called the "Five-Factor Personality Inventory" (FFPI Questionnaire), it assesses the five superfactors of the Big Five model (Hendricks et al, 2003), The Beck Anxiety Inventory, developed by Beck et al. (1988) for the assessment of anxiety-specific symptoms, the Beck Depression Inventory II, for the assessment of symptoms corresponding to the diagnostic criteria for depressive disorders contained in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - IV edition of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM - IV , 1994) and the interview grid that was created to track how the participants felt the effects that the Covid-19 Pandemic had on them. At the same time, the grid aims to identify which behavioral changes have occurred, referring to video games, gambling, food behavior and alcohol consumption.



3. Presentation and interpretation of results

3.1. Presentation of qualitative answers

The participants had the opportunity to freely answer 5 of the questions in the interview grid. The first question that offered this possibility is: "*Please describe how your eating behavior has changed during the Covid-19 Pandemic.*"

Of the 91 respondents, 57 claim that they have not noticed any changes in their eating behavior, but 34 of them answered the question in the affirmative, citing:

- „ *I can say that I started eating more because of the stay at home, I constantly felt that I was hungry.*”
- „ *In terms of dietary changes I noticed that I started eating more and consuming a lot of fast food.*”
- „ *I eat more because I cook more.*”
- „ *I eat a lot more sweets, meals are not regular, some days I don't feel the need to eat at all.*”
- „ *I started having 3 meals a day, including breakfast, which didn't exist before.*”
- „ *I eat more and more unhealthily.*”
- „ *I eat less than before.*”

Young people began to spend more time at home and implicitly had more time to engage in activities such as cooking, meals were no longer taken on the run, and the lack of occupation or stress probably led them to consume more food, to which many of them added sweets or fast food.

To the question "*What emotions did/do you feel when preparing for exams?*", although young people were not influenced by pre-existing answers, 55 of them stated anxiety in relation to preparing for exams, 15 respondents stated anger and anxiety, 6 stated sadness, 8 happiness, slight worry/worry/anxiety - 6 respondents, 1 respondent stated stress - as emotion.

The next open question in this study concerned the psycho-emotional effects they felt because of the Pandemic. The young people felt the change on all levels. Academically, they recorded a loss of motivation, a decrease in creativity, attention and feelings of anxiety and worry, from a social point of view, many of them claimed that they felt alone, withdrawn and relationships with those close to them cooled down, emotionally some of respondents accused panic attacks, fear in relation to their illness or that of their loved ones. From the answers received, We present the following:

„*I experienced panic attacks quite often during the first quarantine in March 2020. After being infected with the coronavirus I felt an extremely high stress level, I had nightmares and panic attacks during the night. As for my social activity, I chose not to leave the house, I stopped seeing my friends and refused to have contact with the outside world.*”

„*Academically, I can say that my career advancement possibilities were limited. Socially, I focused more on the important people in my life. Emotionally, anxiety and fear can sometimes be uncontrollable.*”

„ *The pandemic affected me more on an emotional level, because I was worried about my academic and medical future, but also about the health of my loved ones.*”

„ *I was affected socially and emotionally, as meetings with friends and family became rarer, which caused me feelings of sadness and loneliness, especially at the beginning of the Pandemic.*”



„ Emotionally I felt lonely and behaviorally I became socially isolated. Academically, my involvement in various subjects has decreased.”

„ I limited contact with friends, I was only able to see my family very rarely. Academically, I live in constant insecurity.”

„ I isolated myself, it's hard for me to interact with people and do the things I used to do.”

„ I felt more insecure, my motivation is low, I feel sad because of the isolation.”

To the fourth open question "Please describe whether because of the Pandemic you have felt insecure about your academic situation.", 23 respondents claimed that they did not feel insecure, while 68 answered affirmatively.

The last open question asks the respondents to name the emotion felt most often during this period of the Pandemic, 1 respondent claimed to have experienced positive emotions, and another named a state of calm and tranquility. The rest of the participants claim to have supported emotions such as: fear, anxiety, sadness, frustration, anger, insecurity, mental fatigue, apathy, worry, disappointment, depression, panic, confusion, helplessness, nostalgia.

Therefore, after analyzing the qualitative answers, we discovered the effects that the Covid-19 pandemic generated on the lives of students, in emotional, academic, social, but also behavioral terms.

Hypothesis 1. It is assumed that there is a negative correlation between the variable conscientiousness and compliance with preventive measures against the Covid-19 virus

Table 1. The relationship between compliance with preventive measures and conscientiousness

		compliance with restrictions	F. Conscientiousness
Spearman's rho	compliance with preventive measures	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.029
	N		91
	F. Conscientiousness	Correlation Coefficient	.229*
Sig. (2-tailed)		.029	.
N		91	91

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The analysis of the table shows that there is a positive correlation between conscientiousness and compliance with preventive measures, where n= 91, at a significance threshold of $\alpha=0.05$.



The confirmation of the hypothesis demonstrates that the extent to which the scores obtained on the conscientiousness variable increase determines the extent to which the people who make up the research sample take into account the measures to prevent the COVID-19 virus.

The routine and activities of daily life have changed significantly with the discovery of the COVID-19 virus. In order to limit the negative effects as much as possible, preventive measures were taken, such as: the mandatory wearing of a mask, the ban on rallies, the limitation of travel outside the home, the suspension of physical classes and the replacement with the online environment, etc. To these measures that limited freedom of movement, a lot of internal or external factors determined how people chose to respond: compliance or resilience.

The study demonstrates that there is a close relationship between adherence to these measures and the personality trait of conscientiousness. Conscientiousness is responsible for how the person can control their impulses, involves following norms and rules and dictates how the person will relate to tasks in everyday life, at work or in the educational environment. Thus, we can understand that individuals who score high on conscientiousness are more likely to easily adhere to the quarantine measures proposed by the authorities.

Relevant for the obtained results are the studies carried out by other researchers. In Brazil, it was desired to investigate whether personality traits, extraversion and conscientiousness are associated with how individuals relate to preventive measures against the COVID-19 virus. A questionnaire to identify behaviors related to the pandemic situation and the Big Five Inventory - 2 short form (BFI-2-S) were applied to a sample of 165 students and 492 recent graduates to measure the two mentioned traits. The results obtained in this study are similar to the results obtained in this research. Following the analysis of the data, it is observed for the groups that considered that none of the isolation measures were essential in the current pandemic situation, lower scores, in contrast to the sample that considers the measures important and decide to follow them (Carvalho, Pianowski & Gonçalves, 2020).

Hypothesis 2. *It is assumed that there is a negative correlation between the extraversion scale and depression.*

Table 2. Correlation between extraversion and depression

		F.Extraversion	Depression
F. EXTRAVERSION	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.298**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.004
Depression	Correlation Coefficient	-.298**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.
	N	91	91

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



The analysis of the table shows that there is a negative correlation between extraversion and depression, where $n = 91$, at a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, the higher a person scores on extraversion, the lower they will score on the depression variable.

The hypothesis that there is a negative correlation between extraversion and depression was confirmed in this study. The studies carried out so far, which analyze the same relationship in the context of the pandemic, have obtained similar negative results (Plomecka et al., 2020), positive (Folk et al., 2020) or insignificant correlations (Elmer et al., 2020; Weinstein and Nguyễn).

Extraversion is explained by the attitude the individual has in society, if he feels relaxed, is able to form friendships or participate in activities and discussions in a group. A possible explanation of these results can be based on the fact that extroverts are more prone to positive emotions than introverts. Extroverted people sound cheerful, energetic, assertive.

Extraversion has been shown to be protective against stress, and some research since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic supports this function. For example, a study conducted in the United States demonstrates that extroverted people report significantly lower levels of anxiety, depression and worries about being infected with the COVID-19 virus (Akbari et al., 2021).

Also, we live in a modern age, technology and social networks can help us maintain communication, and implicitly relationships with other people. It is possible that during the Pandemic, despite the distancing imposed by the authorities, extroverts will be allocated a significant part of the time to invest in social-virtual relationships. Whether it's video calls, audio-only or text messages, they've continued to stay in touch with loved ones or meet new people. This aspect being important for maintaining good functionality.

On the other hand, studies have shown that introverts do not tend to seek or ask for help, but instead try to find solutions, self-motivate or calm themselves (Kakhnovets, 2011). This fact can explain the presence of negative affective states, such as the symptomatology of depression, because they can internalize feelings of fear, anger, sadness and worry. Therefore, we understand how introverts may experience the psychosocial and affective impact of the circumstantial changes related to COVID19 more severely than extroverts.

A study conducted in 2022 on a group of 3,563 students in the first year of study supports the results obtained in this research. In conclusion, extroverts experience the psychosocial and affective impact of social distancing and isolation measures more easily than introverts (Yu & Hu, 2022)

Higher introversion (ie, lower extraversion) was associated with higher loneliness, depression, and anxiety experienced as a function of COVID19-related circumstantial changes. The finding converges and deviates from previous literature in several ways.



Hypothesis 3. It is hypothesized that there is a positive correlation between anxiety variables and alcohol consumption.

Table 3. The relationship between alcohol consumption and anxiety

		Alcohol consumption	Anxiety
Alcohol consumption	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.346**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
	N	91	91
Anxiety	Correlation Coefficient	.346**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
	N	91	91

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis of the table shows that there is a positive correlation between anxiety and alcohol consumption where $n=91$, at a significance threshold of $\alpha=0.05$. Therefore, the higher a person's anxiety level, the more likely they are to drink alcohol.

As we know, pandemic situations are a real source of stress. Whether we are talking about the uncertainty, the measures taken, the delicate economic situation or the mortality rate due to this virus, all these aspects are potentiating factors of the symptomatology of anxiety.

Students are a risk group for anxiety due to personal, social and academic factors. The Covid-19 virus adds new reasons for concern, as most students say 76 out of 91 respondents said they felt insecure about their academic situation.

The students in this study expressed that the pandemic created for them a state of tension, anxiety, insecurity, reasoning that they did not know how things would evolve and what would happen next with classes/exams, and the information received from the management was not clear. Another reason for concern was the use of online platforms, there being the possibility of having problems with the internet connection or with the laptop, the fear growing especially during exams, two of the students went through the infection with the Covid-19 virus and were hospitalized, finding it difficult for them to retrieve the information taught in the courses.

Anxiety is considered a mental health problem and causes feelings of worry and fear in those who are affected. Until now there are studies carried out on student samples, which claim that those students who suffer from anxiety are more likely to consume alcohol (Kalodner, Delucia & Upsprung, 1989).

Other studies conducted long before the outbreak of the pandemic also identified a positive correlation between anxiety and alcohol consumption among college students, identifying that alcohol is consumed to minimize anxiety symptoms (Chiapetti & Serbena, 2007). Previous studies are particularly important and support the results obtained for this hypothesis, the higher the anxiety, the higher the alcohol consumption.

A coping mechanism is that strategy adopted by a person, necessary to face or overcome perceived difficulty. At a time when some coping mechanisms (walking, running, going out with friends, shopping) have been significantly limited, it would not be surprising that they are replaced by others – such as alcohol consumption. Unfortunately, not all coping mechanisms are adaptive,



some coping mechanisms have negative consequences, and alcohol consumption is part of the latter category. Alcohol consumption is a serious health problem among students, as studies report it is often associated with anxiety disorders.

Alcohol consumption is often associated, in Romanian culture, with a way to relax and combat stress, having an anxiolytic effect. The relationship between anxiety and alcohol is an interesting one, because when initially consumed, alcohol acts as a sedative, so they can be highlighted improvements in general condition. Alcohol can also cause people to lose inhibitions and act impulsively, but regrets from violent or harmful actions trigger anxiety and increase stress levels.

Researchers continued to investigate the relationship between anxiety and alcohol consumption in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. One recent study investigated the extent to which individuals' anxiety levels were associated with self-reported change in alcohol consumption. Students with higher levels of anxiety were found to report an increase in alcohol consumption rather than no alcohol consumption or a similar amount of alcohol consumption. Students who showed lower levels of anxiety also reported. (Zysset, 2022).

Hypothesis 4. It is assumed that there is a negative correlation between emotional stability and dysfunctional emotions.

Table 4. The relationship between Emotional Stability and Dysfunctional emotions

		F. Emotional Stability	Dysfunctional emotions
Spearman's rho	F. Emotional stability	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	-.543**
		N	.000
	Dysfunctional emotions	Correlation Coefficient	.91
Sig. (2-tailed)		-.543**	
N		.000	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis of the table shows that there is a negative correlation between emotional stability and dysfunctional emotions felt, where $n = 91$, at a significance threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, the more emotionally stable a person is, the less likely they are to experience dysfunctional emotions.

Any disease epidemic, like the new strain of coronavirus, is scary, it goes without saying that people will be scared and try to adapt to these new life circumstances. This hypothesis demonstrates that those who present emotional stability as a personality trait, manage to integrate fear and sadness in a functional way, in contrast to those who are less emotionally stable who orientate towards the dysfunctional side of these emotions.

The high scores obtained for emotional stability indicate that the subject thinks positively, is optimistic, controls his emotions and has confidence in his own strength. Emotional stability is responsible for how the subject will respond to the tasks received, to tense situations. A person



with better emotional stability will not lose their temper when things don't go as planned, they will continue to think positively, regroup and look for new solutions to the situation they are facing.

On the other hand, low scores can characterize an anxious, depressed, guilty, tense, shy, moody person. Studies show that this personality trait is often identified as a risk factor for mental health (Boudouda & Gana, 2020).

During COVID-19, stress levels were higher, but people with high levels of emotional stability were able to overcome these problems, perhaps by following doctors' recommendations, getting information from credible sources, and heeding promoted prevention measures. Of course they also register fear and sadness, but these emotions are functionally related to the current situation, without catastrophizing or creating possible scenarios of the type „what would happen if”, which would considerably fuel anxiety.

When the person lacks good emotional stability and tends towards neuroticism as a personality trait, they will adopt fearful thoughts and scenarios. We can infer that neuroticism worsens symptoms specific to depression or anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. The positive association between neuroticism and depressive symptoms has been confirmed by several studies (Grav et al., 2012; Boudouda & Gana, 2020;).

Soto-Sanz et al., (2021) obtain results similar to those presented previously that support the validity of this hypothesis. They identified several correlations between conscientiousness, extraversion, but also emotional stability with anxiety, depression and life satisfaction.

Conclusions

COVID-19 has been and still is a direct threat to the mental health of students. Until now, only a few studies investigate the psycho-emotional effects generated by the Covid-19 Pandemic on Romanian students. This correlational study provides a starting point for future research, with its findings being supported by the work of other researchers and providing evidence of the importance of personality traits as a relevant predictor of individual differences during the pandemic..

The central objective of this paper was to analyze the psycho-emotional effects that the Covid-19 Pandemic caused on the lives of students in Romania. To fulfill it, variables such as depression, anxiety, functional and dysfunctional emotions were tracked. Also, this work aimed to identify the role of personality traits, how they can influence behaviors, beliefs or moderate the psycho-emotional effects generated by this new created context.

Youth represents an important period, characterized by sensitivity, a risk factor for the development of disorders such as depression and anxiety. These findings highlight the importance of considering these variables in addressing the mental health behavior of individuals during the Covid-19 pandemic and elucidate the literature, providing a deeper understanding of the strong relationship between personality, depression and anxiety

The limitations to which the students were subjected generated new sources of anxiety, depression and new maladaptive coping mechanisms. Alcohol consumption has positively correlated with anxiety, for example. Alcohol consumption is a way of relaxation for many people, but it is important to know that it can increase the individual's vulnerability, affecting them both physically and emotionally. It seems that in addition to performance or career anxiety, the pandemic has worsened the situation, bringing new concerns to students such as uncertainty about



academic standing, fear of not being able to attend classes due to electronic devices, or danger to a future career.

Also, the role that personality has on these effects should not be neglected. The results reveal how extraversion or emotional stability can be good predictors of functional emotions such as sadness and fear. While, at the opposite pole, introversion and neuroticism are risk factors for mental health. They may experience more severely the psychosocial and affective impact of the changes related to COVID19.

Another personality trait to which we have given particular interest is conscientiousness. A positive correlation was identified between conscientiousness and adherence to virus prevention measures throughout the Pandemic. People who score high on this variable tend to listen and follow the measures imposed by the authorities, regardless of their beliefs.

We cannot yet claim that these conclusions are universally valid, but these findings are relevant because they indicate the importance of personality traits in how students, an at-risk group, relate to both recommended actions and how they internalize emotions. Depression and anxiety are serious mental health problems that contribute to psychosocial and academic dysfunction.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added new components and dimensions to stress among students as a result of social isolation, new demands imposed by online learning, to which has been added the fear of infection and the potential loss of a loved one. In these circumstances, the integration of psychosocial and mental health intervention should be considered as an integral part of online education programs.

It is particularly relevant to identify strategies for reducing psycho-emotional effects among the student population. It is also necessary to promote and normalize support networks, especially for students who are at a higher risk of being affected by social isolation. In the long term, it is vital that all institutions prepare for future pandemics by supporting mental health organizations to adopt preventive measures, which have a valuable role in helping people manage anxiety and depression.

This correlational study reveals a significant impact on the affective and behavioral symptoms of students as effects generated by the COVID-19 Pandemic, on the territory of Romania. However, it presents some limitations that include a relatively small number of participants, as well as self-reported data by students on some of the variables – such as alcohol consumption. It should be noted that the results of this research cannot be extended to a wider population than the group of participants.

It would be useful for future research to provide a broader perspective, also looking at demographic factors such as gender or youth substages, and to be extended to a wider population. These could help to better understand the mental health problems caused by the pandemic and, on the other hand, are clinically useful for diagnosis and for planning treatment regimens.

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